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ONE QUESTION.

*By Miss
Justice
Bentley*



BRENTANO'S:

NEW YORK, CHICAGO, WASHINGTON,
LONDON, PARIS.
1839.

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BRENTANO'S.

DEDICATION

TO

M. B. D.



"To the dear presence without whom I were nothing:"

To the source and inspiration of my every endeavor to reach life's highest and best thought, this volume is affectionately dedicated.

PREFACE.

To the great: the Critical: the Public:
To the Voice, fame-making or condemning:
To what is not I among the people:
Greeting; and a word of explanation
Of this book, and what it is and is not.
Here is offered you no finished drama,
Filled with startling incidents and rounded
To a perfect close. Alas, this story
Is not closed, but living on among you!
There is offered here no work of fiction,
To amuse you in some hour when weary.
Do not reading, look for such things, Critic.
There is much among *Belles Lettres* awaiting
All your research and your condemnation.

This is truth, one truth among the many
Lived before your unobserving vision.
This is but the heart-cry of one woman,
To one man's entreating need and anguish.
Haply this voice sent out in some stillness,
Or its echo, when the voice is silenced,
May uphold some heart when this same
question
Hinders gayer sounds from comprehension.
Therefore if one other life may find here,
'Mong these faltering words, some word to
comfort,
Then is gained that which my soul demanded,
And that reached for which the book was
written.
There is comfort ; there is strength and self-
hood,

Wrung from Life's all-seeming incompleteness ;
Wrested from the grasp, that aids, withhold-
ing;

The weak longing to a strong endeavor.
Were the present life its outward seeming,
Birth, and struggle, and defeat, and ending
With some ever dreaded death hour's dark-
ness,

We might then arraign the Power that gave it.
Why a child, in fashioning some plaything
For an hour's diversion were more skillful !
Why a man, in scheming some advancement
Of his fortunes would not fail in planning
The last crowning triumph !

These would fail not

In capacity for plan and action,
As this Power called God, we dare to question,
Fails in every life to grant perfection ;
Fails in every life a compensation
For bestowal ; for its pain and anguish ;
Were the present life its outward seeming.
With great love then, with soul-knowledge
truly
Of the heart's need, are the words now
offered.
They who likewise cry will surely listen.
They who laugh yet will not hear the
message.
Each one to his own, and ever changeless,
God's love over all the lives that question,
God's peace unto all the final answer.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CYRIL DAVENANT.

JOYCE DAVENANT, HIS WIFE.

ELOISE MAYBURN.

GEORGE MAYBURN, BROTHER TO ELOISE.

TWO FLORENTINES.

*S*ROLOGUE.

Standing, with wondering eyes, amid the shows
That so deceive the senses in this life;
Hearing the questions, with which it is rife,
So overpower the sureties that one knows;
It chanced one louder than the rest arose,
Demanding if the name alone of wife
More sacred were than Love: and lo, great
 strife
Filled all my heart, while two their answer
 chose.
For they, to whom the question came, were
 dear;
Most dear unto my soul. I could not place
Against their choice my fiat. World's dis-
 grace
I felt could not o'erwhelm them; nor the fear
Of things Eternal mar the moment's pace
Through which their choice shaped, in their
 soul-light clear.

ACT FIRST.

SCENE FIRST—London. Room in Cyril's apartments. CYRIL writing. *Enter* GEORGE.

GEORGE.

Here is the paper ; all the latest news :
Not that you care much for it (being in
love);

Nor how life turns itself for others' use.
And yet the attention of the World at
large

Each Microcosm has its hour to claim.
Your turn will come with clang of wedding-
bells.

And men will wonder to see consummate,
Among the discords of the present time,

The marriage of the future : the ideal
Made manifest and lived before the gaze
Of doubters claiming that such may not be.
Your turn, O friend ! will come in three
 days' time.

I wander, thinking of your joy and mine,
From that I came to tell you. Come, re-
 turn !

The days you have annihilate in mind
Are yet to pass. Return and hear me read
Of one soul saved from hundreds lost at sea,
When the ship Hester sank six years ago.
Small accidents do serve for miracles
These later days ! Listen how one was
 found

A fortnight since on a lone island's shore :

An island lying in the Southern Sea,
Leagues from the usual track of ships that sail.
A trading-ship, disabled by a storm,
Blown from her course, anchored beside
this isle.

The while her crew repaired as best they
could

Her damaged hull and sought fresh water
streams.

And there, awaiting them within the surf
That overswept her; grasping at the boat,
As if the insentient wood itself could feel
Her joy at rescue; there, the boat's crew
found—

A woman! Cyril, speak. What have I said
To make you turn so pale?

CYRIL.

Her name, her name?

GEORGE.

It cannot be. O Cyril, speak to me!

Her name is even your name, Davenant.

Who is this creature, lost and found through
storm?

Who is this woman, wrested from the dead
To make you look like one who faces Death,
Knowing the while the closing of the strife,
Seeing the conflict's end ere it begin?

Who is she? has she right to thrust you
back

E'en from your wedding-morn, and Eloise?

CYRIL.

Stand back and look not on me! Where I
stand,
Some two feet from you, is Hell's strong-
hold. Lo,
Its breath may wither you. I am undone!

GEORGE.

My brother, that should be; my more than
friend,
Tell me the truth it rends you to conceal.
I stand not here to censure, but to share
Your overpowering grief. I pray you speak.

CYRIL.

This woman is my wife. I married her

Three months before that fated ship went
down.

Talk not to me of miracles ! Why friend
It was for her God cursed that boat, and lo,
She has slipped through His fingers, to
keep fresh

My foolish youth, and darken all my life !
I have no words to tell you how it chanced
I married her. Suffice it that I did.

I married her. She is bone of my bone ;
Flesh of my flesh ; soul of my soul ? ah no !
Within your home my soul's life, knowing
naught

Of this that waits her, dwells.

How may she know ?

How can I tell her of this other one—

Whom the great sea refuses to make clean;
Whom all its waters are not strong enough
To sweep from out our path—this one, who
stands

A something worse than death confronting
me?

The past six years I thought of her as dead:
Through them I grew to love the noblest
soul

Ever incarnate in a woman's form.

The days, in length'ning out three times
their course,

Had brought us, but for this, our marriage-
morn :

Had placed you closer, could you closer
dwell

Within my heart, through standing in men's
eyes

Acknowledgéd what you have ever been,
My brother, soul-companion, truest friend.

GEORGE.

O Cyril, for some word to speak to you !
Not comfort—that's beyond me—but some
word

To change that horror on your face to shame,
To rage, to anything save that which mocks
All loving sympathy with its fell strength.
Is this surprise all evil? Lives there not
In your wife's living aught of former love?
You must have loved her once. You must
have loved.

To give your life into her keeping, man.

Is that all ended, Cyril? Is all lost?

CYRIL.

My wife! O damnéd words! I have no
right

Through life to speak them purely evermore.
My wife! my curse! my fate! whom Destiny
Has saved to blast all lives that come within
Her influence.

You ask if all is lost;
Aye, lost! I never loved her. God knows
when

My passion was the strongest, I most felt
Her lack of what I longed for!

Why, I thought
To find Love's self embodied to my touch!
And lo, through all her selfish soul she ne'er

Had touched Love's meaning.

Far beyond the reach
Of lives like hers Love's sanctuary lies.
She never made her own one sacrifice,
Through which to claim her kinship with
his power.

I had not called her by my name a month,
Before she brought to it what ne'er before
Had soiled it since I bore it, e'en disgrace.
And, ere the honeymoon could pass, she
proved

As false to me, as to the man from whom,
Fool that I was! I thought she had been
won.

I should have known in time. Nay, curse
me now!

Offer not pity. O my friend! my friend!
Some fiend it was that warped my reason's
power:

It was not I, who speak. It was not I!

GEORGE.

I look within my heart and find not there
Curses nor pity; a great wonderment
Alone it is that fills it. I might stand
There in your place and look at you with
eyes

Grown dim from looking at such deep de-
spair;

And this might come to me or any one.
But you! you who have lived above re-
proach!

You, whose integrity has stayed mine own,

When all the World's seemed fleeting !
O henceforth,
I can believe in nothing save the power
That revels in things evil !

CYRIL.

These your words,
Will come to me again, and smite me when
My senses reawaken. Now I hear
Your voice as from a distance, and I see
Your face as through thick clouds.

I am apart
From that I was. I know not anything,
Save this despair, that numbs my every
sense,

And must be faced alone. I pray you go !
If you would help me, keep this from the ear

Of your loved sister, until I first speak
The words, the last of which must be Fare-
well.

SCENE SECOND—Cyril's apartments in Lon-
don. CYRIL alone. *Enter* JOYCE.

JOYCE.

Yes, Cyril, it is I; real flesh and blood.
Have you no word of greeting for your wife?
What! is it such a crime to conquer Death,
Alone in a whole ship-load to be freed
From his embrace?

You did not stand so once;
You looked not at me with such eyes, in
days

Long past, when I came toward you. O, I
live!

I live to tell you that there is still time
To win the happiness you lost because
I lived once in your past.

Lo, I have come!

God has remembered me, and now I stand
Beside your hearth with power to change
the blight

I cast upon it. Husband, speak some word
Unto me! Have you not for me one word?

CYRIL.

There must be somewhere words for every
thought

That comes to man:—but yet I cannot find
An answer for you.

O my God, my God!
Is there an answer anywhere to such
A hopeless problem?

When you left me, Joyce,
You welcomed the escape. Why do you
come
To offer love, now it is all too late
For me to e'er rekindle his old fire?

JOYCE.

Is it for this I stand again within
The world of men, to hear you say: "too
late?"
It cannot be too late: it cannot be!
Cyril, from awful solitude I come;
From months and years of silence I am
brought

To hear this bitter truth. You are unjust:
You who were once so merciful to me.

O how my heart turned toward you in that
night

Of isolation from my kind! I learned
Some new truths in that wilderness. I
learned

To love you better day by day when there
Was naught between my face and Heaven,
save

The faces in the clouds, or curious eyes
Of hungry flying gulls, that rose and sank
Before me on the never-resting waves.

O husband, give to me the chance to prove
Worthy your past forgiveness! Give me
time

To win your love again. I do not ask
More than your heart can give, but only
time
To weave, so patiently, the broken threads
Of our lives' texture into harmony.

CYRIL.

The time is overpast for you to touch
My life with comfort. Come no nearer me,
For I am mad with pain!

I have few words
For you to hear, and they are quickly told.

I love one far above you. Her I love
With all the strength and purpose of my
soul.

I love her, not as I loved you, (*that* fierce
Wild fever of the blood, *that* comes but once

To each man's life!) I love her, as I love
The life you cursed, grown hopeful through
the love;

My deathless soul, but prized through the love;
And you do stand between us!

Would you serve
One who was merciful when you did need
Man's mercy most? then leave me free to
tread

Life's paths with her.

You have it in your power
To bless or curse two lives; what will you
say?

JOYCE.

I love you. What then! shall I send you
forth,

When I have found you, for some other one
To crowd all thoughts of me save bitter ones
Forever from your mind?

There does not live
A soul so foolish. You are mine, mine,
mine!

Aye, you may leave me, curse me, spurn
me, still

I stand between you and all other love
Your heart may turn to. O, I have a power
To make you wretched all your days, or else,
By loving you as wife ne'er loved, to win
Your wayward heart again! What can she do
More for you than can I? Is she more fair?
Has her heart quicker pulses at your touch?
Would she leave name and worldly praise
that you

Might be content as I would ?

O I have

No name save yours; no fame to give you,
free

As I give love, you need not, will not take!

CYRIL.

I had no hope you would give me release.
I know your nature: you are not to blame
Perchance for its weak limit.

Do the worst

You can: live on long years, to prove and be
A barrier to all growth that I might reach.
I nevermore will look upon your face.

While London shelters you the East or West
Shall be my burial place; but if you give
Scandal the least excuse to name you, lo,

I'll shake you from me as I would a snake
That fastened on my hand. Until then, go,
Rejoicing in your power, that yet shall end,
As all things evil must in their own shame!

JOYCE.

I will live here in all men's eyes, a life
Beyond reproach. I will be constant, since
That is my one claim on you. I will be
A pattern for the virtues, save the one
Weak sacrifice of self you do demand.
You'll weary of your new-found love in time.
My power is not all ended. You will come
To me again; and I can wait.

I know
Each word in the hard lesson Patience brings
Unto us. I can love you still and wait.

SCENE THIRD—Parlor in Mayburn House,
——shire. *Enter* CYRIL. ELOISE advancing to
meet him.

CYRIL.

Eloise, Eloise, I thought to speak!
I thought to soften this by words, hard
 wrung
From my grief-closéd heart; but you have
 heard
Before I gathered strength to tell it you.
The whispering world, that glories in the
 pain
Of nobler things than its own fashions make,
Has stung you with the truth, the bitter
 truth,
That no words can make worthy to be heard.

The envious have forestalléd my intent.
The things that feared you, even they did
 rise,
To heights I reared for them to stand upon
And sneer at your undoing; from whence
 they
Have uttered words my great love could
 not find
Save all too harsh in which to speak to you.
And I have brought this to you. I have set
Vibrating with the echo of your name,
The thousand, idle, clamoring tongues, that
 ne'er
Until this hour dared say: "Shame touches
 her."

ELOISE.

Cyril, look up. This hurts me more than all
The hours since yestermorn have brought
to me.

Look at me. Do you fear to face your love,
Your other self, because of suffering?

CYRIL.

Nay, listen, sweetheart, when you shall have
heard

The past, as I alone can tell it you,
Your fealty may swerve from one who proves
Not what your thought of him has always
been.

I know your truth and purity—I know
Your love once granted never can return
To you again to be a sacrament

For some new shrine—but Cyril Davenant,
And your ideal love may stand apart
As far as East from West, the truth de-
clared.

* * * * *

That I have loved you, Eloise, you know.
From childhood's hour this love for you
has grown;
A sweetness length'ning with the days ; a
power
So natural I did not question it;
As one whose life grown suddenly astir
With strange sweet rapture questions, till
he find
Life's crowning wonder, Love, has come to
him.

I loved you as I loved the air, the light,
All graciousness that Nature lavishes
Upon her ways. One does not stop to
thank

The sunshine that makes radiant all the path
Until the storm-cloud shows his need of it.
I grew to manhood blessed by you each day;
Yet missing that, because I stood so near,
Which reaching suddenly had shown to me
In time to make it mine, Life's greatest
good.

I had you always, sweetheart, to make strong
Each worthy impulse of my heart; to bless
With gentle presence each impetuous wish
That restless boyhood mars through need
of such.

Thus time went on, until my eager mind
Grew restive 'neath home's peace, and I went
forth

To gain the wider culture that awaits
The man forsaking all that he has known
For its untried, unproved, yet longed for
sake.

It was in Germany I met the one
Who now doth come to part us. She was
there,

As I, a traveler, and with her were
Her father and a man who claimed to be
Her cousin. Thus it chanced we met; we
were

Companions of a week in a small town,
And lodged in the one inn it did afford.

From the first time my glance espied her
there—

The sunlight falling on her hair's bright gold
Paling before its beauty—I was not
Master of choosing thenceforth good or ill,
Or right or wrong, but only thought which
way

Her will would prove and straightway walked
therein.

O Eloise! to you this seems most weak.
Yet through it all, beneath it was a power
Transcending strength or weakness, and the
time

Was ripe to name it, and its name was Fate.

They were Americans; or so at least
The father was: a man proud of his wealth,

And yet no boaster: proud to feel his pride,
Not weak to make it known. He was
withal,

A kindly-natured man, whose every thought
Centered in the one life that held such power
In its strange light to shadow all who stood
Within the radiance of its influence.

The cousin was a cosmopolitan;
A finished gentleman, incapable
Of seeming rudeness, but who yet contrived
In every accent, each smooth-finished sneer,
That I should keenly feel my lack of years,
My heart's strong hopefulness, my untried
youth,

To be, compared with World's experience,
But blemishes upon the surface smooth

That life should show; but awkward, useless
things;

Obstacles to the heartless, finished grace,
That constitutes one a World's citizen.

She, for whose sake they roamed the World
around,

Was neither English nor American.

No countryman could claim her as his own;
For something of all countries dwelt within
The ardor of her spirit. She was young,
But eighteen years, and I myself could boast
But four years more entitling me to claim
A man's estate, a husband's dignity.

Our courtship was most brief: in three
weeks' time

From the first day I say her we were wed.

And not so long a time did happiness,
(If the wild rapturous dream in which I
spent

Their passing might be called by such a
name,)

Abide with me, before the blow first fell,
That this day leaves me strong enough to say:
No horror yet to be may equal this
That has been undergone; no fear may come;
No grief may stir the heart, that has lived
through

Such horror, grief, and fear to still beat on.

We traveled onward as one company.
She was their life, their journey's main excuse.

Her father could not send so suddenly

His darling from him; so we journeyed on.
We journeyed;

till one night, returning ere
I was expected from a neighboring town,
I walked, not finding her within the inn,
Into the garden.

ELOISE.

Cyril, speak no more
Of this that wrings your spirit with such
strength
Of bitterness—Nay, love, you need not
speak.

I trust you, dear, without this cruel proof.

CYRIL.

She rested in her lover's arms, her own
Around his neck, her sunny hair so close

Beside his dark locks that they might have
stood

As symbolizing in two human forms
The forces, light and shade. And, ere I
might

Make known my presence, lo, they spoke
of me :

He bitterly, but she, she laughed and said ;
He need not grieve o'er kisses idly spent
For pastime with me till the hours could turn
Into the moments they might call their own,
And live for through the other's weariness.

And then I rushed upon them, wild with
pain.

My one thought was to reach them, where
they stood

Sneering at my love-blasted youth; to reach,
And kill him, ere that mocking smile could
leave

The mouth her kisses were yet fresh upon.
But while I sprang my murderous hate re-
coiled

Upon my own brain, and I fell enwrapped
In a thick darkness, which encompassed me
For many hours, and left me when I turned
From its most merciful oblivion,
Weak, as my past had proved; weak as
my life

Must ever thence appear. O fool undone!
O youth then burdened with all deep regret
That age can know! This, Eloise, I speak
Is God's own truth. There is no loneliness

In weakest age, so full of deep despair
As that, youth feels, in gazing hopelessly
At years that stretch their dreaded length
 beyond
Its first wild heart-break to Eternity.

When I awoke I was alone. I turned
My face thenceforth from Germany and spent
Within the south of France some few weeks'
 time.

But, brooding on my evil fate, I grew
Sick unto Death, and near his longed-for
 door

For days I lay, living it o'er at times;
The brief weeks' courtship, the fool's para-
 dise,

The meeting in the garden, and the pain

Of darkness that o'erswept me. Always thus
The fever's pauses left me, the same cloud
Brought all I knew of rest through those
dark days.

Her father stood beside me when I woke
To the full consciousness of my disgrace:
And, while his tears fell, plead with me to
save

His child from her own passion-blasted soul.
He told me what I should have known be-
fore

Of her love for her cousin, whom he feared
E'en as she loved him: plead with me to save
His darling from the evil influence
That long had marred her life with subtle
power.

He had not understood the full extent
Of her mad passion, and had welcomed me
As one God-sent to turn her life's course
through

A clearer channel to some calmer sea.

He had been with me all my illness through;
Tending me while I did not understand
Aught save my loss, my weariness, my pain.
He was an old man, Eloise; his pride
Was brought so low; his love unconquered
still

Was wrestling with me for his daughter's
fame.

If I would but forgive and take my wife
Anywhere, to new scenes, he promised me
He would see neither of us more, until

Life should resume its former happy sway
O'er her sick heart and mine.

Aught that recalled
This shame should be removed, and years
might roll

Between us ere he looked again upon
His daughter's face, if we would only try
In mercy to our souls, to overlive
The darkness of our mutual misery.

And she came, Eloise, and bowed her head
Beside me where I lay, and told me all
Her passion for the man, whom thenceforth
she

Would look upon no more if I would take
Compassion on her sorrow-stricken heart,
And help her toward the peace I too would win.

Beloved, look upon me, with those clear,
Brave eyes, that give me courage to go on
With my most wretched story. Look, although
I dim their clearness with sad tears, that should
Ne'er stir their depths for such unworthiness.
'Twas then I took the step that holds me now
Forevermore from right to comfort you.
Because my life was broken utterly;
Its purpose thwarted and its hope betrayed;
Because she turned to me as to her God,
Asking that I would save her from herself;
I took her hand in mine and journeyed on.
Through France we traveled, thence to Italy;
Reaching at last a villa, where we said
We would woo peace to come to us, nor seek
Its flying shadow longer to o'ertake.

Six weeks we lived there. O, I cannot speak
Of that most useless effort farther, for
You cannot understand! Ah, never yet
Came discipline to you but you have wrung
A sweetness from its hardest touch, a strength
From its most weak'ning trial! We did grow
Each day and hour more utterly estranged.
At last I put the question into words
That long her eyes had asked for far-off home.
She met her father and they sailed upon
The steamship Hester—and you know the rest.

The truth is yours now, Eloise, all told
I can find words for. Cruel story, sweet,
And lamely renderéd. O blame me, love!
Say some harsh word: this silence grows too
strong

For my enduring. O I could not bear
In our old happy days to speak of this,
This blot upon my past! I thought her dead.
I thought to bear my secret in my heart
Where it might cast no shade upon you;
thought,
The past being blotted out, with you to make
A future strong enough to clear its stain
Henceforward from my memory.

She lived,
That Justice might o'erstep its own decree,
And strike through mine your being; lived
to make
A living death of what our love should be.
And now she stands all reconciled, all fond,
Making a barrier of her constancy

Between us, Eloise, I cannot break.
She lived, through storm and wreck and
 danger, dared
Through years of solitude; through hunger,
 fear
Of death in countless ways, to be our curse.
As once my life was blasted so now yours
Is henceforth darkened O what had you
 done
To give her power to harm your blameless
 life?

ELOISE.

Cyril, her power is ended to make dark
Your life and mine. No human creature bears
The right to injure past a certain point
A fellow-mortal's life.

The worst is done.
She has brought shame and torture unto you.
She has despoiled your heart of the first
strength
That was its natural heritage; but yet,
When all is done, O Cyril, still there lives
Within your nature's depth, a strength be-
yond
Which sorrow cannot pierce you! O my
love!
Stand forth within the sunlight. Hold your
wound
Out where the airs of Heaven may search
it through:
Wring from its throbbing torture the last
drops

Of the envenomed shame that festers where
The darkness of your morbid fancy makes
A cloak to hide it from God's blessed truth.
Thus sooner shalt thou cleanse it.

Stand thou forth;
That mankind seeing, may thus gain with you
The nobler strength that comes from daring
all

That Pain may bring us. Stand thou; rush
not in

As eager fools where angels fear to tread.
(Ah, many such there be who gladly run
Toward every trial they know not.) But as
they,

Who having reached Pain's mainspring, find
no pang

In its endurance sharpened by the fact
Of their foreknowledge.

Brave to dare and do
Be thou, Beloved, knowing all that waits
Within Pain's touch, and strong that thou
dost know
All anguish, rapture, feeling of thy soul
To be subordinate to thy true self.

CYRIL.

O Eloise, you give me words, yet words
That I shall live upon the silence found
I turn to from your presence! Love, my
love!

I had forgotten, till God thrust me back
From His own peace you showed me, all
the weight

Of the old burden that six restful years
But make henceforth more grievous to be
borne.

ELOISE.

I give you words to-day and yet, God knows,
I loved you yesterday above all else
That He has made. You were one in my
thought
Of what was perfect.

CYRIL.

Now alas! I fall,
As I did tell you that I feared I should,
From the ideal you loved, to something far
Too weak to move you by its misery.
O woman, whom I counted once a part
Of this same cast-off life's identity!

Have you no tear to shed for this that breaks
Asunder from your keeping evermore?
Have you no natural heartache in this hour,
No pity for yourself or me? You used
To feel compassion for each helpless thing
That claimed your notice of its suffering;
And now your life is touched you have no tear,
And all men, judging by your face would say:
This is a stranger parting from you here,
Not one who thought this day to call you wife.

ELOISE.

Cyril, Beloved, this our parting proves
Sad enough without tears of mine to make
Its anguish deeper. I could feel no more
With their proof on my cheek your loss and
mine.

CYRIL.

Why do I rail against you this last time
That I may look upon you? Let me take
And place the memory of your face this day
Within my heart so deep that nevermore
The jarring actions of the days to come
May stir its deep foundation therein laid.
Sweet, it is needless. Ah, there lives not one
Swift change upon your face, one subtle grace,
One play of soul, that forms the perfect lines
Of its expression but I've made my own
Through hours of watching.

Kiss me once again;
That I may set its seal forevermore
Against all lesser passion that may seek
To stir my heart thus guarded, then Farewell!

SCENE FOURTH.—Cyril's apartments in London. CYRIL and GEORGE.

GEORGE.

Cyril, our world is all astir with this
Strange finding of your wife, and your despair.

My sister's name is made a common sound
In all men's mouths, and scandal with such
shame

All satiate calls for new developments.

What will you do, take up your cross again,
And live beside your reclaimed sorrow here?
Or will you travel till the law can take
Its course and free you from your unloved
wife?

CYRIL.

The law is powerless as I. There is
No law in England to break off the chain
I have forged for myself.

When one condones
An offense such as hers, unless again
His wife sins the man may not be released.
This woman gained a strength in solitude
To flinch not from her purpose. She will
hold
Herself from all reproach to torture me.

GEORGE.

I cannot bear to leave you, though to stay
Brings you no comfort. This is not the time
For words; what solace lies in words?
They prove

When our great need comes empty, useless
things,

Forms of a sympathy more quickly felt
In the warm hand-clasp and the tear-dimmed
eye.

And yet, O friend, with whom my life has
reached

Its utmost power, its noblest thought, to turn
Now from you seems so cruel, though it be
For my loved sister's sake! We go from this
Changed isle to-morrow morn to Italy.

Promise me here that you will never try
Henceforth to see her face. She loves you so.
I love you both, though now I stand between
Your impulse and best good. Come, prom-
ise me !

CYRIL.

A promise from one in my state of mind
Betokens nothing. I am here to-day.
I know not where another morning's sun
May shine upon me.

Go your way and take
The blessing of my life from these weak arms,
All powerless to hold her.

I will make
No promises henceforth to God or man.

*A*WAKENED.

O my love, my own, that I had some word
to describe it!

Word to prison it in, that so it might not
die with me!

There is no word save love. Love means
both passion and object.

Is it joy or pain that I feel, in this strong
new sense of rebellion?

Is it hope or fear, this unrest that will not
let me be happy?

I shall never be happy again. I have paid
that price for your kisses.

Never again shall I know the half-content
of the happy.

O my love, my own! Do they know, who
call themselves loving,

This that we know, when we stand with
eyes too blind through their rapture

To gaze on each other's face, with hearts
too faint through their beating

To hold the wonderful strength, that through
their weakness is wasted?

Love, that means sacrament, this, does it
come to all of the creatures

That use the word lightly between times,
between their laughing and sighing?

That laugh and kiss and forget, and say
they have loved one another?

Love, that surging through, cleaves the
heart so undone by its proving,

Rend'ring it all unfit thenceforward for
holding contentment;

Weakest and strongest of all, is it one to
weakest and strongest?

Love! the triune, that means pain and hope
beyond power of describing;

Love! ne'er so swift in his flight but the
shadow abides of his passing;

Love! the betrayer perchance; the comforter
maybe, but always

The Wonder one could not but choose, though
one knew the choice ended in sadness.

O my love, my own, lo, this you have
taught me o'ermasters
Even the teacher's power: never again can
you claim it!
Love and yourself are not one; though you
brought to me, through your choosing,
Force and direction and strength, my life
had not held, sweet, without you.
Now though you come or go, yet all through
the coming and going
Love, the reality stays: I may live no
longer without it.

ACT SECOND

SCENE FIRST (three months later)—A thoroughfare in Florence. *Enter* TWO PEDESTRIANS.

FIRST SPEAKER.

The season drags, the townspeople one meets
Look weary of the sunshine. Everywhere
The gay world turns save to this place,
 more dear
To us freed from the idling, foolish crowd.
The villa is deserted. No one stays
Save the sweet English lady, she who mourns
Some lover laid beneath the English sod.

SECOND SPEAKER.

You do mistake, she mourns for no man dead.
Her sorrow is a living one, in truth
I have it from the best authority.

She is the lady who was to have wed
With Cyril Davenant, but that his wife,
Kept hidden from the world until the day
He thought to wed with this one, suddenly
Appeared to save her from such deep disgrace.
Ah, Pakovitch, these English are sad dogs.
Their evils live not on their surface lives
As ours do. They conceal them well indeed,
Beneath their haughty face-masks—but they
grow.

And this man Davenant is not content
With spoiling her fair future, but he stands
This day in Florence, where they once have
met.

I myself saw them meet this very morn.
When, slowly through the sunshine she
drew near

Where he stood listless by the Arno's brink,
He seemed as one on whom the event was
thrust;

Not like one gaining that he long had sought.
And while he drew his breath as one in pain
Draws scant'ly of the universal good,

I saw a look, that only once before
I had beheld, thank God! in a man's eyes.
That was you may recall, when Pedro
drowned,

That stormy night in autumn eighty-three,
When we lay pinned to deck by the ship's
mast,

Nor could stir hand or foot to rescue him.
His father looked so while he could not move
To save the lad. That was a bitter time.

FIRST SPEAKER.

Aye, I remember. Did she meet him thus,
Choosing her footsteps tending, or as one
That walks Fate's footpath blindly, unpre-
pared ?

SECOND SPEAKER.

The latter: till his eyes looked into hers,
She had no thought to meet him. Then—
but she

Was always pale—she grew yet whiter, while
Her body's blood ran swiftly to her heart,
To find what stronger motion than it held
Could cause it beat so fast. Ah, then a light
Brake o'er her face such as I've seen at sea
Dart suddenly from thick-piled clouds, when all
The sky was black with storm save the one
place,

Revealing the Sun's glory. He should not
Have come again to make that pallor change
To light that I saw shine there.

Better far
Her face had altered unto paler death
Than brightened 'neath his glances.

They will meet.
I heard him, standing by her side declare
He would be with her ere the day was done,
And that was in the morning. Come away,
Their sorrow or their sinning is not ours.
Each man bears his own burden, though
One died
They tell us bearing all, but long ago.

SCENE SECOND—Eloise's apartments in Florence. ELOISE and CYRIL

CYRIL.

I have come, Eloise, to end this strife
That weakens both our lives.

I dare to stand
Here in your presence, as in God's, and say,
That this that holds you from me is a lie;
This worldly standard of morality.
It does not comfort you, this World's decree.
It has not power to bring to you again
The old time courage for Life's ills, although
You place it in your heart so far beyond
The worth of one man's love. O Eloise,
Look at me, answer me! Do all the tongues
That sound the World's amen bring to you,
sweet,

The wild rejoicing in their sound that mine
Does in thus calling you again, my love?

ELOISE.

Why do these tears fall now I see your face,
That daily blurred its image in my mind?
Ah! is this you? and say you still my love?
Why then I have lived for this hour through all
The desolate, blank days that held no trace
Of your loved presence. Through the silences
That fed and grew upon my soul's decrease;
Through barrenness of thought and life I lived
For this, although I knew not it should come.

CYRIL.

You greet me love with tears, through which
your soul

Shines warmer welcome than could bright-
est eyes

Unclouded by such rapture. Yet my words—
You do not say: for these the crowning shame
Your love has brought my life, I do forgive.

ELOISE.

O love, my love! the word forgiveness means
That which men feel when injury is done
Unto them. Think then, can you injure me?
Your own life would be marred in doing so.
Can you lay down your life or take it up
At sudden choice? This wonder that you
bear,

Nor understand through all your misery,
Is not your own, nor mine, though I am
part

Of the unfoldment of its mystery.
O my Beloved! O my nobler self!
O my completement, lo, there is no need
Between us evermore that one should say
Unto the other, stoop now to forgive!

CYRIL.

Heart's dearest, holding in your strong
white hands

The pulses of my life; heart's bravest, lo —
My life and I are yours! I will not stay
Beside you now, lest this glad rapturous hour
Of our reunion cause you sweet, to speak —
Some hurried word you might repent to stand
Apart with from my — presence. Eloise,
My thought — was — formed before I saw you, lo,
It is but fair that you should speak few words

Until you frame an answer. Either way
Your answer, dear, shall drown all lighter
sounds

From our lives passing. If your word is yea,
We nevermore can lose its awesomeness;
But little days and acts will echo still
Through their minutest ways some trace of it;
As one may hear in inland countries from
Some hollow shell the murmur of the sea.
And if your word is nay, if it is nay,
My darling it is still your word. I go
That you may choose if I henceforth shall go
Alone or close beside you. I will come
To you again in three days time to hear
If life or death awaits their ended term.

SCENE THIRD—Eloise's apartments in Florence. ELOISE and JOYCE.

JOYCE.

I stand to-day, an uninvited guest
Before you, Madam, hoping thus to hear
News from you of my husband, who has been
But lately in your presence.

I do live
Apart from his good graces now, that you
May be the more exalted. Understand
That this continues only for a time.
But, while the time lasts, lo I had in mind
A foolish fancy to behold your face;
Which, being seen, brings rest unto my soul.
Is this a face for parting man and wife
Save a few moments only? Is it this

That I have lain awake through midnight hours
To picture forth its charm?

Why, one can find
Ten, twenty, fairer than it in each block
One passes on the street; no fire, no life,
No passion in it to retain the love
Its fragileness awakened.

ELOISE.

I have heard
From Cyril Davenant—

JOYCE.

My husband, yes—

ELOISE.

The story of your life, and pardon me
I have no wish to know aught of it more
Save the unalterable fact, it is.

I pray you leave me as you chose to come,
Sans ceremonie.

JOYCE.

You are hard and cold
And merciless. I did imagine you
A different woman. I did fear you—I,
I never shall again. I will not go
Until I say the words I came to say;
Until I wring your heart as you have mine,
What have you done with him whose name
I bear?
Where is my husband? You who stand
there have
No right I should not question.

When he loved
Me first he turned his calm indifferent gaze

From your cold perfectness that could not
hold

Regard it scarce awakened; aye, he turned
For love from you to me, and do you think
He will not turn again when he shall find
Your love a fragile thing, unfit for aught
Save daintily to walk beside him, while
The sunshine of World's favor says you may;
But powerless to dare all, shame and death,
And loss of all that makes your little life
Now precious in his sight?

ELOISE.

It may well be
This that you tell me; I am hard and weak.
I never held a thing within my hand
So costly as this man's love and then threw

It from me that my heart might thus be made
The stronger by so doing. Solitude,
And separateness from my kind have come
Unto me as Love's guerdon, but I make
No plaint of this to you or any one.
Our lives have separate aims. We need not
stand

To wail one mutual sorrow: it can be
But unlike to us, though men give one name,
That of loss to it, it can never mean
The same thing to us here or elsewhere.

JOYCE.

What do you know of solitude within
The crowded street? If you had stood as I,
Hearing no sound save that the great sea
brought,

Thundering each day within my ears the
wail

Of all dead voices it had silenced!
My own the only live one to shriek back
Against such multitude of quenched fear,
The living terror, grown so strong in me
Of my own spirit. Ah you then might speak
Of solitude and separateness—then—
But not now!

ELOISE.

I have no more words to say.

JOYCE.

O you, who never tempted stand and hold
Your thought even from the fallen!

You who feel
A courage not your own, because unwrought

Through travailing of soul to the one strength
Thus gained and made your own!

O womanhood
Yet all unproved, with no more words to say
To one who faltered where you stand secure

Untempted by your nature. God has set
Your feet within straight paths, and guarded
strong

Your heart against all passionate swift right
Another heart might claim there.

Thank Him then,
Not your own purity: thank God, and turn
Back to so thank Him where no other soul
Be hindered in its journey that you may
Find gratulation farther. I have done.

God send you in some hour of bitter need
More words when your occasion shall demand,
Although you speak as I have spoken here,
Where other human presence there is none.

SCENE FOURTH—Eloise's apartments in Florence. CYRIL and ELOISE.

ELOISE.

This day decides it: this blue summer day,
Which lighter hearts are spending out of
doors

In the day's fulness. You and I and one
Unhappy insect striving 'gainst the pane
That holds him from the light; we only
breathe

The bitter air of bondage. Pray you ope
The casement, let him go. There is no need

Of other suff'ring in this world than that
We two know in this hour. And now my
love,
Let me speak first, for when I shall have
done
There may be no need one should speak
again.

Turn backward with me to the time when first
We loved each other. Can you now recall
When this that is Life's strongest part be-
gan?

It were as easy to recall the hour
When your first childish word was utteréd
As tell when wordless Love first drew our
lives
From lighter living to his Empiry.

CYRIL.

I cannot turn my glances far enough
Into my past to see a time in which
You brought not added grace to every
thought
That this my poor life holds without you,
love.

ELOISE.

What is there in your kiss that takes from me
The strength to tell you what I must of
truth?

That's stronger than your kisses—only that
In this wide world. I pray you let me go.
I am not sure when thus you hold my face
Between your hands what is the right, and so
I cannot tell you if you will not hear.

CYRIL.

I will hear any word, aye every one
That you can find it in your heart to speak
To one who loves you better than the form
Of man-made laws, you place such trust
upon.

My own dear love! I will not touch you
now.

You shall stand all uninfluenced to prove
That which is best for both. Would I
could take

All previous influences that weigh down
Your gentle spirit with the subtle power
That lies in custom-made observances,
And leave you free from the World's past
to choose

Our future! Try, sweetheart, to judge for us
As you would judge if you had never known
Lives weaker than your own. Ah! surely
then

You would not send me from you, solely for
The reason that I love you next to God?

ELOISE.

The time crowds fast upon us. Could I
know

One little hour of rest in which to choose!
But I shall never know heart's rest again.
Since I first entered Womanhood's ordeal
How many times, though vainly, have I
wished

For power to turn and grasp some vanished
hour

Of my lost childhood. There were many
then,
Fast spent, unprized. O wealth of rest
contained
In those past hours! If one could only fit
Into the jar and fret of wiser days
Such freedom from World's care, and thus
live on
More strong to bear the weight of thoughts
that crush
The tired brain with their unending round!
This may not be, and so we judge and
choose
And stumble blindly through Life's maze,
when all
Might be so changéd, if Forgetfulness

Would lay her quiet fingers on our brows,
Some moment's space each day.

You speak of laws:
Man's laws, you say—not God's—man's laws
which break

In striving to uphold such wrong as this
Would prove to us. True, love, man's
laws may be

Made and unmade as circumstances and
chance

May dictate, but beyond these laws the one
Great law of God: Thou shalt not sin: is
firm

To break our selfish loves that threaten it.

CYRIL.

My darling, listen to me! There's no law

Exists, so strong as this, Love's law that binds
You to me! Do not set for you and me
A task so hard, so beyond human strength
As parting. You might better take this life,
So purposeless without you, make an end
Of this its maimed expression among men;
Than with your words condemn me to such
fate;

Existence without impulse higher than
My soul feels of itself. There is no sin
In this my turning toward you, in that you
Grant inspiration to Life's highest good.

ELOISE.

Say any words but these and I am strong!
These shake the deep foundation of my
strength

As founded on an error.

Is there right,
O Cyril, is there wrong, save in our thought?
Our wavering thought calling to-day's deed
good

That yesterday was evil; wiping out
All wrong and suffering through its kind
intent,

That meant well; surely all that is good,
Since once it was pronounced so.

O the pulse
Of the World's heart we have no power to
stay

Calling it this or that name! O the sin,
The ignorance that stalks on undismayed,
By its new title Undeveloped Good!

You do regard the purpose of my life
As something warped through fear from
rightful choice.

Yet I to-day could stand before mankind,
The sleek, contented, virtuous, prosperous,
And give them scorn for scorn, and tell
them that

This love I bear you is the same that makes
Their blessing and my curse, aye, I could
dare

Each bitter word they said if that were all.

CYRIL.

If God were merciful, if He could reach
A guiding hand to lead one through this
maze

Of troubled time. If He could only say:

“This path, this course, this action is the
right”!

But if he has the power, He has no will;
And I am close beside to love you, I,
A human presence. O my love, my own!
How can you turn from me unto the void
That hides what will not answer, though
you call

Forever to the clear Perfection, that
Needs not your toil, nor heeds your dis-
content?

ELOISE.

He does not answer me, yet am I sure
At times, (O that such moments came within
The setting of each day!) He hears and
knows

My yearning toward him. If there were no
God

Even of my conscience I would make one
still

To strive toward and adore, but that there is
Such answer to my need, I am as sure
As that all else beside it is but vain
Subservience to its asking.

CYRIL.

O my God!

Is there among Thy worlds a place where one
May strive and grow and never feel the sting
That waits us here in each completement that
Writes failure on our foreheads?

Shall we find
Amid Thy myriad times, a time when we

In reaching aught without which liés undone
All former striving through which we have
sought

To gain and make our own Thy thought
of us;

When we may hold the sweet we love a
part

Of life—not something torn from out the
heart

When most it grew thereto—not something
slipped

From underneath the feet on reaching heights
We might not gain without?

We grow to love
Strange things. Our grief, our loss, our
shame even seems

Sometimes a staff to help us farther on;
A something tangible amid Life's shows,
Most blest because most real.

I do know
While standing here undone, existence
proved

All bitterness, all failure, I do know
A strength so past all comfort, so beyond
All need of happiness, so utterly
Apart from all things save its mastery!
Yet, contradiction that I am, I fall
Back from it oftentimes in terror, thrust
Between its higher promptings and my soul
A crowd of petty duties, grosser cares,
Turn to it only when the small things fail
To keep my starving nature longer down

Unto their level. O my Eloise!

Answer me—since God may not—tell me from
Your clearer knowledge why all growth is
found

Through such discouragement?

O sweetheart, come
And be an answer to my questioning soul
Through life and death until we two may
stand

Within the flaming knowledge all unscathed
That tries our natures here so cruelly!

ELOISE.

I have no strength to stand before that
Power
That made me strong to see and know the
right

And choose the wrong. Not even for
Love's sake,
Stronger than all things else because the
right
Is strongest. Heart's beloved, I am yours;
Yours through all parting, meeting accident,
This World can force upon us; yours to
grow
Up to God's throne with; yours beyond all
power
In evil things to part us! I am strong
Because of my great love for you. I dare
Not listen to your calling.

Were there one
To choose for, that one I, the choice were
made

As soon as offered. What there is to fear
Of consequence to me in present time
I do not care for. What there is to dread
In unknown future, this I know and dare
In parting from you. Would there then
for me
Be aught in dread to hold me from my place
Beside you?

All Eternity's compressed
In each sharp moment of complete regret
That this life holds for me when separate
From you, Beloved.

When the cup is full,
What matter if beyond its little brim
The ocean surges? it can hold no more.
But there are two to think of. Could I stand

At last in God's great presence and excuse
For my love's sake the sin that held you
from

Your true inheritance of perfect love?
In that clear hour 'twould seem a grievous
thing,

Not love but hatred that so weighed you
down

With selfish claims till you could only stand
Ashamed of all things else because of it.

CYRIL.

Eloise, you are strong to shape your fate,
And you are strong to make or hinder mine.
O love! why look you forward to some time
In unknown future when God shall make
plain

A path we might find here and enter on
In present time? My love, my Eloise,
God is not strong enough to force the right
Upon us! Listen, sweetheart, to this truth
I have wrung out of bitter suffering.

There is no power in Heaven, Earth or
Hell

To force the soul's direction save the strength
Inherent in itself.

You think some day
To hear a voice say: "From your patience
proved

Through years of waiting your reward is
wrung;

Henceforward happiness is yours." Ah love!
I question if the end is meant to be

Happiness there or here. How may one use
Life's bitter discipline in some long rest?
When one has borne hunger and cold so
long

The sweet things sting so, find one all unfit
To welcome them!

It may be never meant
For strongest souls, souls fitted to endure,
To win contentment; growth comes not
that way.

Dear, we are struggling upward through
the clods

Of earthly hind'rances. When we have
reached

The light beyond, the upper freedom, we
Shall find no sudden change, but still bear on

Through new conditions the old nature's
power,
The strength, the growth, that ceasing
would be death.

You will be never nearer me than now:
Now, while you place a name, a law, a
breath,
Between us and our future. You but wait
For what is yours, your own, placed in
your hand.
You lose long years in dull abandonment
To dragging sorrow which might all be
used
In undivided struggle toward the good.

ELOISE.

Cyril, I stood in darkness, but the light

Is won, and shines henceforward more and
more
Unto the perfect day. I stood alone
Through the long months since last we
parted, sad,
In England's spring-time, and I heard no
word,
Save the dull chiding of my heart that
called
Loudly for justice against God's decree.
But, through your words, bringing my own
thoughts back
New-clothed in vesture of your earnest
speech,
And through all promptings of my lower
soul,

Demanding Love's contentment as its due,
I hear a voice where there is none to speak,
And I alone to listen, and I dare
No longer raise my own against the sound
That drowns your pleading with its stern
command:

“Thou shalt go thus far and no farther
tread

Life's paths together till some future word.”

I cannot go beyond you; cannot take
My soul from out your soul-strength that
has grown

Such part of it. I may not anywhere
Find rest again, Beloved, till we stand
God-unioned, one complete soul, undis-
mayed.

But I can wait throughout earth's changing
time,

For the Unchanging to make manifest
The life's complement, here so soiled and
worn

By my tears falling:

gathering strength to learn
From lessons taught by nature, that I stand
Not the one inharmonious thing within
A universal harmony; not lost
To future peace and blessedness that now
The bitter waters of adversity
Are come into my life. They may not take,
While sweeping fast from weakened grasp
the things

Once counted part of life itself—aye once

Thought very life of life—they may not take
With joy and youth and hope the Wonder,
that
Called Love, proves God, to chosen souls
that reach
Through its divineness all of certainty.
The patience, O the patience! While we
wait,
The winter days storm-laden, bring the
spring,
The tender, fragile spring the summer
hours,
The summer changes to the ripened close
Of Nature's handiwork the perfect year;
And year to year succeeds, the while we
mourn

The equal changes that must needs be met
In the unending progress of our lives.

Love I but turn from you some moment's
space

To cleanse my wedding garment from all
stain

Earth may have cast upon it ; turn to win
The beauty incorruptible that may

Be never henceforth tarnished in your sight.

O help me Cyril, help me here to turn !

For I do feel that from this hour our lives
Grow out apart toward God, or turning
else

To one dark sin, grow downward, down-
ward till

We lose forever more the power to turn.

O Heart's Beloved! for some strange new
word

Never yet spoken of man's lips, some word
To hold the love I bear you. Ah your face
Flames back to mine the answering
thought, there needs

No word, or old or new, between us twain
Forevermore there needs no hindering word!

CYRIL.

With this your answer Sweetheart, all is said.
There is no word to say except Farewell,
And that I cannot bid you, though it turn
To hallelujahs in some after time
Yet darkened to our present.

What shall I
Hearing no inward voice of solace do

With this my earth-life's burden till the
hour

Your soul forsees of union past the power
Of the grave's mouth to thwart us?

Ah this grows
Too hard for your enduring! I forget
While leaning on your nobleness the strain
My grosser nature brings you. Eloise,
Look at me, listen to my words, the last
That I shall ever speak on earth to you.

Think of me henceforth, when men speak
my name

Unto you, as perchance they may, with
praise

Of effort slow-accomplishéd to power;
As one who reaches what he knows of grace,

And strength and sweetness through his
love for you,

His changeless, deathless, wondrous love
for you.

Think of me as I last stood in the light
Of the fast-sinking sun in Florence here,
Telling you that the light that dims his
power

The light that guides you into peace, shall be
Henceforward mine, beyond all doubt's dis-
may

To overcloud. O love, my own true love,
God bless you freely as you have blessed me
Through all your noble life!

God keep you dear!

I, who would do all things to bless you, I,

Must leave you where I found you, in the
light

Of His near presence.

God forgive you, sweet,
If my o'erreaching love a moment dimmed
Your clearer vision, through your own
heart's strength

Of self-surrender to its clamoring need.

* * * * *

Forgive as we forgive our debtors? More!
Show more of tenderness. Help us to bear
Our lives injustice, Lord, till we may reach
Forgiveness in our turn, for all who stand
Needing as we the larger Charity,
Waiting revealment through Earth's many
days.

Our questioning is ended. There remains
For us henceforth endurance, nevermore
The agony of conflict we have known.
Endurance, through Earth's sunshine and
its shade;
Endurance, through the mirth of weaker
things;
Endurance, till Death's merciful caress,
I would this hour brought to us, you and
me;
That we might never know a lesser thought;
That we might never feel a weaker thrill
Of pain or pleasure, to upbraid our lives,
With hint that this hath been!

My own, my love!
I go with the lost day, and lo, the night

That knows no earthly change, the night
has come!



EPILOGUE.

And so they turned, as she had said toward
God

The bending of their steps: Chose thus to be
Among the few in Life's great mystery
Who tread the paths by mankind all untrod;
Losing the sweetness of Love's certainty,
For the more awful chance, that the grave-
clod

Must first be passed to prove the surety
That souls forereach by Faith's divining-rod.

And what they reached of sacred wonder-
ment,

Or what they bore of sorrow desolate,
I may but dimly feel, the while I wait
My own life problem's solving to me sent.
Trusting as they in the great Calm's con-
tent,
Our restlessness foreshades to be of Fate.







WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantsville, Pa.
March-April 1989
We're Doing Good

